



Marker Text

Republic Aviation Corporation, located on this site, was an essential part of Evansville's World War II defense industry. Over 5,000 men and women manufactured 6,242 P-47 Thunderbolts, 1942-1945. P-47 was principal WWII fighter plane, known for its speed, durability, and reliability.

Report

The majority of the marker text can be substantiated, but is reliant only upon secondary sources. This report utilizes primary sources to confirm marker statements and provide context about Evansville's war industry and World War II fighter aircraft.

A 1942 *Evansville Courier* article confirms that Republic Aviation Corporation was located on Highway 41 North, corresponding with the marker address listed on [IHB's website](#).¹ Republic Aviation broke ground for the plant on April 7, 1942, nine months ahead of schedule, as construction was originally planned for June 1943.² The exact number of Republic employees at the Thunderbolt plant requires additional research. A 1991 *Traces* article cites 5,000 workers, but in a 1946 address to plant employees Republic President Alfred Marchev thanked 20,000 men and women for their help constructing the fighter planes.³ However, the number he cited may also refer to the other P-47 Republic Aviation plant, located in Farmingdale, New York. The majority of sources agree that the factory produced approximately 6,242 Thunderbolts.⁴

Despite conflicting reports about the number of Evansville Republic workers, it is clear that the P-47 plant was an essential part of Evansville's World War II defense industry and contributed to the revamping of its economy. After companies such as Republic Aviation, Sunbeam and Chrysler acquired war contracts, the "city had completely reversed its status from a distress area to a potential labor shortage area."⁵ In 1943, Manager of the United States Employment Service Thomas W. Bennett described the transformation of Evansville as the "story of Cinderella . . . From rags to riches in less than one year's time," claiming that "since the outbreak of the war, the number of industrial workers has more than tripled to meet employment demands."⁶

In his *Traces* article, Darrel E. Bigham states that approximately fifty Evansville companies were awarded defense contracts during World War II, increasing employment to 60,000 by the end of the war, up from 18,000 workers in 1940.⁷ Republic Aviation played a direct role in this economic improvement, as Bigham attributed the rapid "move from economic disaster to nationally touted success," in part, to the "securing of the Evansville Shipyard and Republic Aviation."⁸ C.B. Enlow, 1943 Director of the Vanderburgh County Civilian Defense Council, asserted that war plants drew an additional 25,000 permanent residents to Vanderburgh County.⁹



This local defense industry employed residents that otherwise may not have found work, including the blind, deaf and physically handicapped.¹⁰ Louis Ruthenberg, President of the Indiana State Chamber of Commerce, stated that the Evansville war plants absorbed “all available residents, particularly women who formerly did not work in factories.”¹¹ He asserts that before the war women made up only 15 percent of factory workers in Evansville, but with the loss of 1,000 men to the military, female workers comprised 40 percent of the factory workforce.¹² Likewise, Bigham contends that the employment opportunities provided by Evansville’s war plants “cracked traditional stereotypes of the roles of African Americans and women and established preconditions for change in the late 1950s.”¹³

Primary sources substantiate the marker statement that the P-47 was renowned for its speed, durability and reliability. In his 1942 [Valparaiso Vidette Messenger](#) article, Arthur F. Degreve claimed that the U.S. Army Air Forces desperately needed new military airplanes because plans for combat aircraft were made in 1937 and that consequently “some are ‘badly designed or ill matched’ against the enemy equipment and some now in action have definite deficiencies even within the purposes for which they were designed.”¹⁴ A 1943 *Hammond Times* article contends that the Thunderbolt’s durability and reliability countered problematic older models, stating that they were the first fighter aircraft equipped to escort Flying Fortress and Liberator bombers on the lengthy roundtrip flight to Germany.¹⁵ The 1943 article states the P-47 was the heaviest fighter ever built and that it overcame “high altitude handicaps,” successfully challenging the German Focke-Wulf 190.¹⁶

The Air Force praised the [speed of the P-47s](#), asserting that their “remarkable diving ability” allowed them to dive at enemy fighters and quickly climb up to diving altitude again, using machine guns to literally blow Japanese “lightly built aircraft out of the sky.”¹⁷ United Aircraft News states that the Thunderbolt’s speed derived from its “highly supercharged 2,000-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engine” and “sturdy construction to withstand the terrific stresses at those speeds.”¹⁸ The P-47’s superiority also derived from its ability to survive immense battle damage.¹⁹ While various primary and secondary sources contend that the P-47 provided the Allies with an [exceptional fighting advantage](#), IHB now avoids the use of subjective and superlative terms such as “first,” “best,” and “most.”²⁰ Such claims are often not verifiable and/or require extensive qualification to be truly accurate. That is the case with this marker’s claim that the Thunderbolt was the principal fighter plane.

Further Reading

For an image of Republic Aviation employees at the P-47 plant, see <http://www.courierpress.com/photos/galleries/2010/jan/30/whirlpool-history/6811/> .

For a film describing the use of the Thunderbolt in Italy in World War II, see <http://archive.org/details/thunderbolt>.



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For a film describing the speed, force and firepower of the Thunderbolt, see <http://archive.org/details/TheP-47>.

Indiana's Department of Public Welfare's *Public Welfare in Indiana* provides an excellent description of employment, education, housing, industry, religion and health in Evansville both immediately prior to and during World War II and in relation to war plants such as Republic Aviation (The Indiana Department of Public Welfare, *Public Welfare in Indiana* (Formerly *The Indiana Welfare News*) 53, no. 6 (June 1943), Clippings File, "Indiana Cities and Towns, Evansville -1969" Indiana State Library).

For context about Evansville's economy and the impact of the Republic Aviation plant, see Darrel E. Bigham, "The Evansville Economy," *Traces* (Fall 1991): 26-29.

For an Air Force Fact Sheet about the P-47, see http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=2213&page=1;
http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=8109&page=1.

For statistics about for various P-47 models, see Enzo Angelucci, *The American Fighter* (New York: Orion Books, 1985): 390-396.

¹ "Roar of New Plane's Engine Draws Cheers as Republic Aviation Ship Rolls Down Runway," *The Evansville Courier: The Sunday Courier and Press* 4, no. 38, September 20, 1942, 1, Indiana State Library microfilm.

² For the date of ground breaking, see Republic Aviation, "A Message from Republic Aviation Corporation to Our Thousands of Loyal Friends," *Evansville Courier*, February 1, 1946, 6.; For breaking ground early, see "Roar of New Plane's Engine Draws Cheers . . .," 1.

³ Darrel E. Bigham, "The Evansville Economy," *Traces* (Fall 1991): 27.; "A Message from Republic Aviation Corporation to Our Thousands of Loyal Friends," 6.

⁴ Bigham, "The Evansville Economy," 27.; "A Message from Republic Aviation Corporation . . .," 6.

⁵ Louis Ruthenburg, President Indiana State Chamber of Commerce and President, Serval, Inc., "Production and Personnel Problems," *Public Welfare in Indiana* (Formerly *The Indiana Welfare News*) 53, no. 6 (June 1943): 19, Clippings File, "Indiana Cities and Towns, Evansville -1969" Indiana State Library.

⁶ Thomas W. Bennett, Manager, United States Employment Service, "Jobs Look for Workers," *Public Welfare in Indiana* (Formerly *The Indiana Welfare News*) 53, no. 6 (June 1943): 6, Clippings File, "Indiana Cities and Towns, Evansville -1969" Indiana State Library.

⁷ Bigham, "The Evansville Economy," 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.



⁹ C.B. Enlow, Director, Vanderburgh County Civilian Defense Council, "Evansville Feels the Impact of War," *Public Welfare in Indiana* (Formerly *The Indiana Welfare News*) 53, no. 6 (June 1943): 3, Clippings File, "Indiana Cities and Towns, Evansville -1969," Indiana State Library.

¹⁰ Bennett, "Jobs Look for Workers," 6.

¹¹ Louis Ruthenburg, President, Indiana State Chamber of Commerce and President, Servel, Inc., "Production and Personnel Problems," *Public Welfare in Indiana* (Formerly *The Indiana Welfare News*) 53, no. 6 (June 1943): 19, Clippings File, "Indiana Cities and Towns, Evansville -1969" Indiana State Library.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bigham, "The Evansville Economy," 27.

¹⁴ Arthur F. Degreve, "OWI Gives Report on Long-Argued Quality of American Planes," *Valparaiso Vidette Messenger*, October 20, 1942, 3, accessed NewspaperArchive.com, July 15, 2013, <http://access.newspaperarchive.com/valparaiso-vidette-messenger/1942-10-20/page-3?tag=owi-gives-report-on-long-argued-quality-of-american-planes&rtserp=tags/?psi=38&pci=7&ndt=by&py=1942&pey=1945&pep=owi-gives-report-on-long-argued-quality-of-american-planes&psb=relavance>.

¹⁵ "Thunderbolts Alter Picture of Aerial War," *Hammond Times*, April 15, 1943, 15 (accessed NewspaperArchive.com, July 15, 2013.; Department of the Air Force, "Army Air Forces Aircraft: A Definitive Moment," U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet (National Museum of the USAF), accessed July 1, 2013, http://www.afhso.af.mil/topics/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=15231&page=1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Department of the Air Force, "Col. Neel E. Kearby: Pacific Thunderbolt Ace," U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet (National Museum of the USAF), accessed July 1, 2013, http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=8109&page=1.

¹⁸ United Aircraft News, "P-47 Scores in Two Theatres," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1943, 42, accessed Historical New York Times, July 10, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.ulib.iupui.edu/hnpnewyorktimesindex/docview/106640451/13FA0DC7D5123BF533F/1?accountid=7398>.

¹⁹ Department of the Air Force, "Army Air Forces Aircraft: A Definitive Moment," U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet (National Museum of the USAF), accessed July 1, 2013, http://www.afhso.af.mil/topics/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=15231&page=1.; According to Enzo Angelucci, Robert S. Johnson's "plane had been hit 21 times by 20mm cannon and 100 times by machine gun, but his faithful 'T-bolt' did not let its pilot down and, although wounded, he was able to make a forced landing behind Allied lines. So it was not surprising that, after the first feeling of disorientation had worn off, the P-47 being so much heavier and more powerful than the planes experienced pilots who converted to it had flown, there were very few who were not enthusiastic about it" (Enzo Angelucci, *The American Fighter* (New York: Orion Books, 1985): 395).



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²⁰ Department of the Air Force, "Army Air Forces Aircraft: A Definitive Moment," U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet (National Museum of the USAF), accessed July 1, 2013, http://www.afhso.af.mil/topics/factsheets/factsheet_print.asp?fsID=15231&page=1; "Thunderbolts Alter Picture of Aerial War," *Hammond Times*, April 15, 1943, 15, accessed Newspaper Archive, July 15, 2013, <http://access.newspaperarchive.com/hammond-times/1943-04-15/page-15?tag=thunderbolts-alter-picture-of-aerial-war&rtserp=tags/?psi=38&pci=7&ndt=by&py=1942&pey=1945&pep=thunderbolts-alter-picture-of-aerial-war&psb=relavance>; "Thunderbolts Have Proven Superior to Luftwaffe," *Hammond Times*, May 11, 1943, 4, accessed Newspaper Archive, July 15, 2013, <http://access.newspaperarchive.com/hammond-times/1943-05-11/page-4?tag=thunderbolts-have-proven-superior-to-luftwaffe&rtserp=tags/?psi=38&pci=7&ndt=by&py=1942&pey=1945&pep=thunderbolts-have-proven-superior-to-luftwaffe&psb=relavance>.